

CHAPLAINS AS PASTORS

by

Ch (MAJ) James E. Singleton

General Staff Course
U. S. Army Chaplain Center and School
Fort Monmouth, New Jersey
February 8, 1985

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	1
The Biblical Basis for the Role of Pastor.	2
The Biblical Basis for the Role of Administrator	5
Pastors in the Military.	7
Unit Chaplains.	8
Supervisory Chaplains	9
Reserve Chaplains	12
Toward a Pastoral Role	13
Conclusion	17

CHAPLAINS AS PASTORS

INTRODUCTION

The chaplaincy is a ministry to people in a military community. In this relationship, chaplains have responsibilities such as staff officer, administrator and soldier. But the most important work is that of pastor.

The chaplaincy is the only institution in the gigantic world of the military charged with spiritual ministry to people. Chaplains have a unique role, a role which only they as pastors can officially fulfill. If chaplains fail to fulfill this role, they will encourage opposition to the institution of the chaplaincy. It will be said that chaplains are not necessary for the life of the military. They will, in effect, work themselves out of a job which is nevertheless needed.

One particular threat to the unique role of the chaplaincy is the almost inevitable movement toward an administrative style of ministry. As chaplains rise in rank, they have less of a pastoral ministry and more of an administrative ministry. They take on more management positions and spend less time in personal relationships of a spiritual nature. David P. Byram, an Air Force chaplain, in an article

in Christianity Today,¹ writes that the role of the minister is prophet, priest and pastor. But too often, Chaplain Byram says, the minister is spending his time as promoter, planner, pusher and performer. His work is less a ministry to persons than it is to a program.

All chaplains, regardless of rank or responsibility in the structure of the military, are to serve as pastors. They are to be concerned above all other tasks, with the souls and eternal destiny of the people around them. Administration is a task which is to facilitate the pastoral ministry. It is therefore subordinate in purpose, time and effort. The military people need spiritual leaders more than administrative executives.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE ROLE OF PASTOR

Chaplains are to serve as pastors according to the convictions of their hearts. In their ministries they are to be spiritual leaders. This means they are, first of all, examples by their daily walk. The Apostle Paul wrote to

¹David Paul Byram, "Pastor-a-Go-Go", Christianity Today, April 13, 1978, p. 12.

Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. But set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."²

Pastors are, secondly, preachers of the Word. Paul continued to instruct the young minister Timothy, "Until I come devote yourself to public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching."³

Further, a pastoral task is to teach the people. "Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction."⁴ The pastor-teacher is to equip the saints---that is, to prepare others for ministry, to help others in their ministry, and to build up the flock. "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers; to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up."⁵

These are the things that should be taking place in the work of pastors in a military community. To this ministry

²New International Version. I Timothy 4:12.

³I Timothy 4:13.

⁴I Timothy 4:2.

⁵Ephesians 4:11.

---godly example, biblical preaching, and faithful instruction---chaplains have been called, ordained and commissioned. The responsibility is given to no other. It is their reason for being where they are.

The following is a summary of what The Book of Church Order in the Presbyterian Church in America describes as the role of pastors. They are to watch diligently over the flock that is committed to their charge that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They are to exercise government and to take oversight, not only of spiritual interests, but of all the needs of the people. They are to visit people at their homes, especially the sick. They are to instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children and pray with, and for, the people. They are to be careful and diligent to seek the fruit of the preached Word from the flock. They are to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God. They are to administer the sacraments. It is their task to declare the will of God to sinners and beseech them to be reconciled to God. They are to bear glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing.

Military chaplains' lives and ministries say this is the way to walk. The way they live, the way they preach,

the way they teach, is all to demonstrate the way people are to walk before God. This is the role of pastors and this is the mission of chaplains.

In a letter dated 1 April 1983, Chief of Chaplains Hessian quoted Carroll Wise's definition of pastoral care as "...the art of communicating God's good news to persons at the point of their need." Chaplain Hessian goes on to say, "we have many responsibilities, but above all, we are pastors."

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATOR

To place primary importance on the role of pastor is not to say that administration is unimportant. Administration, biblically understood, is people-oriented. The word "administration" comes from a root word meaning "to serve." There are three Greek words in the Bible, which are translated in the New International Version as "administer" or "administration." The first is found in II Corinthians 8:19 and 20. The word means to serve, to minister, to serve another's interest. The noun form is translated elsewhere as service (see I Corinthians 12:5 and II Corinthians 9:12). Administration is, of course, necessary. When properly done it has in mind the needs of people. It is not divorced from ministry to individuals, but is directed to serving the

needs of people in a community. It serves the need to receive grace in it's various forms---physical, material, emotional, spiritual. Reports, records, letters and meetings are meant to give grace to help in time of need.

The second word translated "administration" is found in I Corinthians 12:28 and refers to the gift of administration. It means "the helmsman". or one who has the ability to direct, lead, and coordinate. Organization and coordination is not an end in itself. It is to direct, to lead, and to assist people in the use of their abilities and their gifts for the good of others. Administration is to meet the need of people to be useful.

The third word is found in Ephesians 3:9 which speaks of the administration of the gospel, and refers thus to an arrangement, a regulation, an economy, a dispensation. Administration is to serve the need of people to be in a proper relationship to God. Chaplains are to administer the mystery of the gospel, to reveal the arrangement that God has made for the salvation of people.

The role of administrator is an enabling ministry. The work of administration opens the door to ministry. It is a door which every chaplain must open and through which every chaplain must pass. It is a door which senior chaplains

open not only for themselves but also for the subordinate chaplains. Chief of Chaplains Patrick Hessian wrote that the chaplain is to involve others in the chapel program--- in worship, in planning, in leading. And this itself is to be understood as a ministry to others. He urged the chaplains to reverse the trend of contracting services. The ministry is for him to do and for him to involve the military community in doing.⁶ The work of administration is to minister the grace of God in its various forms, to help people be and feel useful, and to direct them in their proper relationship to God. In this the chaplaincy is primarily a pastoral role.

PASTORS IN THE MILITARY

It is the duty of chaplains to know the persons whom they serve as pastors. At whatever level of their assignment, they must make every effort to identify the persons who consider them their chaplain. There is a feeling among military people of all ranks that they desire to identify "my chaplain". This kind of relationship to people is something of which chaplains should take advantage. It is

⁶Patrick Hessian, "Chaplains and Religious Education/Youth Ministry/Parish Visitation", 6th Army Chaplains Newsletter, 1 November 1983.

essential that chaplains learn who these people are, so they can be their pastor.

Unit Chaplains

Unit chaplains have a special opportunity to minister to a relatively large group of men who are located in a small area, united in a specific mission, and available at the same time. They can preach with personal knowledge of their congregation because they know their people. Unit chaplains can have a tremendous effect on others by providing specific programs from worship services and Bible studies to prayer times and retreats. Having a personal relationship with the people, chaplains will find that people will respond to them and to the programs they provide for spiritual growth.

If chaplains do not know individual soldiers, if they have not taken time to visit them where they work and to ask about their needs and their families, if chaplains do not take time to get to know soldiers personally, then these soldiers will rarely respond to a sudden effort on the chaplain's part to involve them in a specific spiritual program. But if chaplains have ministered as pastors to the soldiers, they will respond more readily. They will seek spiritual counsel and participate in programs which the chaplains promote.

The chaplaincy is not an institution to administer, but an opportunity to minister. It is an opportunity to enter into the military community as a man of God. In this, unit chaplains can be pastors to many people who in the civilian community would not seek out such counsel but will take time to talk to those who are in uniform with them. And if military chaplains will take the time to minister in a spiritual way to these people, the community will receive something that is very special and unique.

Unit chaplains are like baseball players. They do not manage, but rather play. Managers are hired to manage, but players are hired to play. And chaplains are players. They are on the field. They are catching the ball and throwing it to others. They are relating to the men and women who surround them.

Supervisory Chaplains

Supervisory chaplains have a role which is more difficult to define as pastoral. And yet even these chaplains must know those people whom they serve as pastors. They are the headquarters personnel, the people in their units of assignment, the commanders and staff officers, and the subordinate chaplains. Supervisory chaplains must know who these people are and continue their ministry as a pastor. The coordination, the supporting, the facilitating, the enabling must take place.

But it must never take the place of spiritual ministry.

Senior chaplains work for a senior commander. As the work comes down, the ministry should go up. Just as the Holy Spirit is a comfort and help to the Christian, so chaplains are to be a comfort and a help to their commanders. Chaplains are to be listening to the program of commanders and responding to their needs, their troubles, their worries and their concerns. Senior chaplains, as pastors, minister to the spiritual lives of the people around them.

Chaplains must discover their unique role and do it. Supervisory chaplains, while they speak often of their role as pastors to other chaplains (they importance of this role can be blown out of proportion), must be careful not to simply direct them but to touch them. They should touch subordinate chaplains with respect to their personal lives as well as their job, if indeed, supervisory chaplains are their pastors.

Supervisory chaplains must also be aware of those privates, sergeants, lieutenants, majors, colonels and generals, who are right next to them---in the office next door, in the room across the hall, at the staff meeting. They must be aware of these men and women as spiritual beings who have a need of ministry. They must not think that these

people are so important and so busy and so advanced and so mature in their responsibilities that chaplains are not needed or wanted. They are wanted more than they think. They are needed more than they know. Former Chief of Chaplains Gerhard W. Hyatt writes of the ministry he had in the lives of special people. "The position of Chief of Chaplains gave me access into lives that I never dreamed I would ever be able to touch. Even today I am grateful that God gave me that opportunity. I am still the spiritual advisor to some of the 'greats' whose paths crossed mine. And in their spiritual need, God committed me to provide a service."⁷

Failure to fully exploit the opportunities of the chaplaincy is often due to the weakness of the flesh. It is not so much that people do not want it, as it is that chaplains do not take the time to do it. Chaplain Gordon M. Schweitzer wrote in an article, "Pastoring begins with people. When paper, budgets, facilities, programs or anything else takes priority over people, chaplains lose their reason for being."⁸

⁷Gerhard W. Hyatt, "The Special Ministry of the Chief of Chaplains", Military Chaplains Review. D.A. Pam 165-118, Summer 1978, p. 2.

⁸Gordon M. Schweitzer, "An Inside Happening: Post Chaplain as Pastor", Military Chaplains Review. D.A. Pam 165-105, Spring 1975, p. 22.

Senior chaplains have a tendency to dilute their ministry with non-pastoring efforts. Their role is not specific enough or special enough. They then have little reason for being where they are. Other people in the military community can often accomplish the same things that they do. When these chaplains, however, take their role as pastors seriously, and minister to their people as pastors---even at a senior level---then they have a special reason for being.

Reserve Chaplains

Reserve chaplains have a special role with problems and advantages that are unique. There is the problem of the conflict of time and limited time that they have available with the people. They must take every advantage of what time they have to accomplish all that they can. On the other hand, they have the advantage of pastoral experience and are able to bring that pastoral experience from their churches into the reserve chaplain's role.

Reserve chaplains may be most susceptible to wasting time in administrative matters on the weekend drill. It is easy to be caught up with the task of getting their paperwork, their schooling, their orders, their pay in order, and not taking the time to relate as pastors. Great effort must be made to assure that pastoral ministry takes place, that example is

set, that the Word is proclaimed, that the sacraments are being observed. And much effort must be given to seeking out those who need counseling, leading people in worship, and involving others in the religious program.

Making good literature available is an important ministry. Too often what is offered in the chaplains' offices has to do with re-enrollment and other Army information. Religious literature---literature which can be a help to people spiritually---is rarely available.

Much effort is given to prepare for ministry at mobilization, but more effort could be made to minister now. Reserve chaplains can be a great service in weddings and in funerals. They must seek to relate to their people in a personal way so that they will call upon them when they have such needs---particularly those who will not seek out a civilian pastor.

TOWARD A PASTORAL ROLE

Army Regulation 165-20 paragraphs 2 and 3 gives the primary mission of chaplains as providing for the religious and moral needs of the military community. Thus, the target of chaplaincy is the military community. To accomplish this mission the regulation says they are to provide for the

religious and moral needs of military personnel with an emphasis on the welfare of the soldier. They are to assist the commander to ensure that the policies and leadership practices of the command are in keeping with strict moral, ethical and humanitarian standards. Commanders have great responsibilities and as chaplains rise in rank and serve as pastors to commanders with greater power and authority, the responsibility increases. It is the concern of the chaplaincy to help commanders direct their people righteously, ethically, and with genuine compassion.

The following are a few suggestions to help move chaplains toward the fulfillment of their role as pastors.

1. Be more open and accepting of theological differences but without compromise. In much of the training of chaplains, both at the Chaplain School and on a continuing basis in the field, spiritual issues are set aside. It is assumed that each chaplain deals with this in his own denominational background. It is also feared that the theological differences are too great to bring such discussion into the open.

On one particular occasion several years ago, unit chaplains at Fort Carson, Colorado, were discussing their desire to sponsor an ecumenical retreat involving both Roman Catholics and Protestants. Planning progressed quite far

before it was noted that theological differences would divide the retreat on certain issues of discussion. No one wanted to address these differences.

In the military, chaplains are involved in training and ministry that is closely associated with pastors of other denominations and doctrines. In the name of unity the really significant aspects of ministry are often passed over. Chaplains fear that they cannot handle the differences. It is important that they acknowledge and accept the differences; that they begin talking about spiritual ministry. Chaplains should be able to admit that they are not going to be in complete agreement with each other in doctrine or style of ministry. Acknowledging the differences, they can free themselves to communicate with other chaplains about the pastoral role and put it to work.

2. Provide continuing education in the pastoral role.

Training in management and military matters is helpful, but pastoral training is also needed. Why is it that so little is written of the preaching done by chaplains? Even considering the relatively small number of chaplains, why is it that chaplains do not gain prominence as great preachers of the Word? Why is it that so little is heard of the methods and the gifts of teaching and the training of teachers in the chaplains' ministry? In the military chaplains are to be

experts in these things. In the letter mentioned earlier, Chaplain Hessian wrote, "The people to whom we minister expect many things of us. But the common expectation is that we will be capable of relating to them as a pastor in times of crisis and in times of celebration."⁹

The chaplain corps needs training in pastoral ministry. For most of the chaplains, their education and preparation for the ministry took place some time ago and their emphasis since then has been more in administration, including methods and styles of ministry. Chaplains need an ongoing emphasis upon how they ought to preach, how they ought to counsel, how they ought to teach, and how they ought to visit.

3. The administrative tasks should be left as much as possible to chaplains' assistants. Chaplains should learn to trust a great deal of their administrative responsibilities to their enlisted helpers. For the most part, assistants have been trained to fulfill this role. If not, they should be so instructed. Chaplains' assistants will perform well when they see their work as enabling the chaplains to do pastoral ministry. Chaplains will be released from administrative pressure as they give more of the business of the chaplains' office to others who also serve.

⁹Hessian, 6th Army Chaplains' Newsletter, 1 November 1983.

CONCLUSION

The chaplaincy is a unique institution and it has a specific purpose to a great cross-section of people in our society---the military community. Chaplains are pastors and they must serve these people as pastors. Whatever their responsibilities toward their fellow chaplains, whatever their responsibilities as military persons, they must first of all fulfill the role of pastor. Chaplains are to use this opportunity for the best advantage in the spiritual lives of people around them.

What do chaplains want to be remembered for? Do they want to be remembered for being good administrative chaplains? Do they want to be remembered for planning programs and organizing activities well? Or do they want to be remembered as pastor chaplains---as chaplains who were present with the people, as chaplains who preached the Word, as chaplains who taught the things of God?

It is too easy for chaplains to be "secular" ministers. Edwin F. Erwin wrote, "Are chaplains fulfilling their mission in the military? It is my contention that many are not. They are spending much of their time at a secular job, rather than doing what they are commissioned by God to do."¹⁰

¹⁰Edwin F. Erwin, "A Divine Commission", Military Chaplains Review. DA Pam 165-115, Fall, 1977, p. 11.

The role of pastor in the military community is a high calling and a calling which chaplains cannot leave to others. It is a calling which they must fulfill in the Army community.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Byram, David Paul, "Pastor-a-Go-Go". Christianity Today.
April 13, 1978.

Erwin, Edwin F. "A Divine Commission". Military Chaplains
Review. DA Pam 165-115. Fall 1977.

Hessian, Patrick. "Chaplains and Religious Education/
Youth Ministry/Parish Visitation". 6th Army Chaplains
Newsletter. 1 November 1983.

Hyatt, Gerhard W. "The Special Ministry of the Chief of
Chaplains". Military Chaplains Review. DA Pam 165-
118. Summer 1978.

New International Version of the Bible.

Schweitzer, Gordon M. "An Inside Happening: Post Chaplain
as Pastor". Military Chaplains Review. DA Pam 165-105.
Spring 1975.